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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [PM](#)  
SUBJECT: PANAMA: PRD NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES TO ELECT  
LEADERSHIP SLATE ON AUGUST 30

REF: A. (A) PANAMA 1408  
[1](#)B. (B) PANAMA 1346  
[1](#)C. (C) PANAMA 1309

Classified By: Ambassador William A. Eaton. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Governing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) National Assembly Deputies will meet on August 30 to select in a secret ballot its slate of candidates to lead the chamber, PRD National Executive Committee (CEN) Member Samuel Buitrago explained to Ambassador on August 23. Presently, Pedro Miguel Gonzalez, wanted in the U.S. for the 1992 murder of U.S. serviceman Zak Hernandez, leads the race to be the next President of the National Assembly. "Gonzalez is the natural candidate to lead the chamber," National Assembly Deputy Miguel "Micky" Aleman said, later adding, "At this stage, the only way that Gonzalez will not be elected is if he withdraws from the race." Buitrago and Aleman made these comments during an August 23 coffee hosted by Ambassador for young rising PRD stars that also included Vice Minister of Housing Doris Zapata, Panama City Councilman Carlos Perez-Herrera, and Alternate National Assembly Deputy Miguel "Micky" Sierra. In comments to the press, President Martin Torrijos and First VP and FM Samuel Lewis separately indicated that the election of the next National Assembly President was in the legislature's hands. Post remains hopeful that President Torrijos' personal assurances that Gonzalez will ultimately step aside -- assurances conveyed by Lewis and Minister of the Presidency Ubaldo Real in Panama City and by Panamanian Ambassador Frederico Humbert in Washington -- will be fulfilled. End summary.

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PRD "Bancada" to Elect Leadership in Secret Ballot  
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[1](#)2. (C) PRD National Assembly Deputies "will meet on August 30 to elect its nominees to be the next President, First Vice President, and Second Vice President of the National Assembly as well as the chairman of the Assembly's committees," PRD National Executive Committee (CEN) Member Samuel Buitrago told Ambassador on August 23. Buitrago explained that the PRD's CEN members would preside over, but not vote in, this election; only National Assembly Deputies would vote in a secret ballot. The PRD CEN -- which is chaired by President

Torrijos who is also the party's Secretary General -- would count the votes and certify the winners. Given the PRD dominance in the National Assembly -- it holds 45 of its 75 seats -- the PRD's leadership slate would be elected formally on September 1 during the opening ceremonies for the new legislative session.

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PRD Deputies: Gonzalez "Natural" Candidate, Has Votes  
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13. (C) PRD National Assembly Deputy Miguel "Micky" Aleman and commented to Ambassador that Gonzalez was the "natural" candidate to lead the National Assembly. Alternate (suplente) National Assembly Deputy Miguel "Micky" Sierra noted, "Gonzalez has the votes." Gonzalez was "objective," "open-minded," and "fully understood how to manage the National Assembly," the assembled PRD rising stars agreed. In response to inquiries by the assembled PRD functionaries, POLCOUNS layed out the U.S. position as reported reftel A.

14. (C) In a subsequent pull-aside with POLCOUNS, Sierra and Aleman said that Gonzalez's candidacy sprung as an initiative from the National Assembly and was not being forced upon them by the Executive. In response to questions about how serious Gonzalez's situation with the U.S. was, POLCOUNS noted that: Gonzalez's problems were of a legal, not a political nature; these problems would not be resolved with an "political understanding" and that the U.S. still sought to bring Gonzalez to justice for the murder of a U.S. serviceman. Surprised that POLCOUNS was aware of President Torrijos' and First VP and FM Samuel Lewis' August 13 meeting with Gonzalez and current National Assembly President Elias Castillo, Aleman and Sierra acknowledged that Torrijos had given his imprimatur to Gonzalez's candidacy. Nonetheless, both asserted that by that time, Gonzalez had already emerged as the PRD bloc's near-consensus candidate as the result of a series of meetings among deputies. Aleman noted, "At this stage, the only way Gonzalez won't be elected is if he withdraws his candidacy."

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Torrijos and Lewis: It's in the Assembly's Hands  
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14. (U) President Torrijos told the press on August 23, "I reiterate there are no pressures. At a given moment, the (PRD) bloc will reach an agreement and decide who is to be the next president of the National Assembly." Separately while traveling in Brazil where he attended the Latin America-East Asia Cooperation Forum, First VP and FM Samuel Lewis commented to the press, "The Foreign Ministry has not tried to become involved in matters that are of a purely domestic nature for our country." According to press reports, Lewis said he supported Gonzalez who he characterized as "one of the young leaders who has demonstrated great capacity within the PRD and national politics."

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Comment  
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15. (C) Barring a last-minute request from Torrijos to Gonzalez to step aside, Gonzalez is on track to win the support of his fellow PRD deputies to be the National Assembly's next president on August 30. The PRD dominated Assembly would then elect Gonzalez formally on September 1. Post remains hopeful that President Torrijos' personal assurances that Gonzalez will ultimately step aside -- assurances conveyed by Lewis and Minister of the Presidency Ubaldino Real in Panama City and by Panamanian Ambassador Frederico Humbert in Washington -- will be fulfilled.  
EATON